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NEGRO IDEALS—THEIR EFFECT AND THEIR EMBARRASMENTS

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IDEALS DETERMINE RACIAL OR NATIONAL DESTINY

Conscious ideals determine the destiny of nations. The Greeks sought elasticity and symmetry of body and mind. To this end the state directed all its conscious training. To this same end tended the influence of the Greek's environment. Hence in Hellas the world's highest aesthetic and philosophical development. The Roman sought grandeur, organization, military glory. Hence the unconquerable armies of Julius Caesar, and the wonders of the Augustine era. Germany has taught its youth for nearly a century the arts of war. Authority has insisted that every citizen should doff his cap to the military officer. The mighty energies of her people have been centered in the production of armament. The result is such a miracle of overweening military efficiency that the rest of the civilized world is called upon to check its progress. The aim of conscious Chinese training has been for centuries a perfect memorizing of the precepts of Confucius and Mencius. Chinese adolescents have been saturated in the needs, principles and practices of their forbears. The result in China has been unparalleled stagnation, and the formation of a "cake of custom" which all the force of western civilization can hardly break. In our own land there is everywhere apparent a striving for material success. Zealous enjoyment of the outward things of life and "making money" are characteristics. The result in our nation is the submergence of the scholar, the poet, the saint, the artist, the philosopher, and the ascendancy of the great magnate, the captain of industry, the millionaire.

THE INADEQUACY OF RACIAL AND NATION IDEALS

But although a people's conscious training and environment make it possible fairly to determine the quality of a people's spiritual, political and industrial order, it is not possible by these tokens to say whether any race group will endure. There has thus far been no nation whose ideal has been sufficient for its cumulative needs. Thus far there has been no ideal that adequately squared with practical conduct on a wide racial or national scale. Whether in Egypt or Persia, the far East or the nearer West, the characteristic ideal of every people thus far has been wanting in some essential. The love of the beautiful has failed. Worship of military might and glory has been sterile of good. By this program men have reaped little more than inter-racial and inter-national hatred. Even Jehovah's wars have always aborted. All of Europe has at times been astir with a mighty religious enthusiasm, but this enthusiasm has not brought enduring peace. The perfect sanctity of St. Francis himself was not sufficient. Europe has at other times worshipped the lure of flesh and blood. No one will forget the day when a woman from the streets of Paris was lifted to the holy place in Notre Dame as a symbol of reason. Not all the blood of the disastrous French Revolution has yet been able to make amends for this travesty. So each ideal in turn has appeared and disappeared through the centuries. Magnificence, organization, beauty, material power, have all left something to be desired. No nation has been able permanently to stand. We can speak with authority of the future of no human group.

EUROPE AS AN EXAMPLE

The present European war, for instance, is making over again the map of Europe. Races will be inter-fused, which heretofore were widely separated. The ends of the world have met in the blood-stream of battle; boundary lines have been effaced, and racial and national animosities have been both relieved and deepened. Here is the world's latest

shifting, re-casting and abandonment on a gigantic scale of race and national ideals, here also the unparalleled exhibition of their inadequacy. The conflagration in Europe brings to mind anew one of Francis Galton's pessimistic conclusions. "We find ourselves," he says, "face to face with two indisputable facts which everywhere force themselves on the attention and compel consideration. The one is that the whole of the living world moves steadily and continuously towards the evolution of races that are progressively more and more adapted to their complicated mutual needs and to their external circumstances. The other is that the process of evolution on this earth, so far as we can judge, has been carried on neither with intelligence nor ruth." Clearly, that which has neither intelligence nor ruth is governed by no law of logic, and lends itself to no prevision.

THE PECULIAR GENERAL PLIGHT OF THE NEGRO

In this world view, then, it is impossible for an enlightened mind to be dogmatic as to the complete sanity and lasting efficacy of any program or ideal having for its aim the enduring development of any group of people like the Negroes in the United States. It is hazardous to prophesy what the future is to bring forth for a people so peculiarly circumstanced. The Japanese have proved how difficult it is for an upward-striving race to set up for itself an ideal that will embrace the enduring elements of civilization, and at the same time escape the weaknesses and pitfalls of the races and the nations that have not endured. The condition of the civilized Negro in America is complicated by the fact that he does not occupy a separate territory in which he may freely develop according to his innate or acquired genius, but is inextricably involved in the conflicting ideals, sentiments, opinions, customs and practices of the environmenting white race. He is also well nigh hopelessly embarrassed by the deliberate organized efforts of the numerically superior white group in the midst of which he lives to fasten upon him in varied forms the stamp of inferiority.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE NEGRO

The Negro is still further baffled by the instability and chameleon-like character of those ideals which have been offered to him by those from whom he has learned the arts of life. Christianity magnifies the importance of humility, teaches the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God, and brings to the world the convincing Gospel of love as the solvent of human problems. The colored man, however, fails to see in his relations with his white neighbor any faithful practice either of the fatherhood of God or the brotherhood of man. The humility which is in him a native trait has been exploited for material profit. Putnam Weale in "The Conflict of Color" has been frank enough to warn all white civilization that it will do well to continue its preaching of the gospel of humility to the prolific colored races of man. If once these innumerable peoples were inducted with some militant faith like Mohammedanism there might come upon the world such a race conficce as would pall the horror of Europe. The Negro in America, then, finds a wide divergence between the teachings of Christianity and its actual practices. The church of God, with all its professions of peace and righteousness, shuts its doors deliberately in the black man's face. Those whom it most needs to serve are those whom it deliberately avoids. If it serves, it renders that service in isolation, and in the spirit of condescension. In 1915 a Negro who should enter a white church of God anywhere in the South—barring the Catholic, Christian Science, and Bahai Communions—with the idea of worshipping at ease and with confidence by the side of his white brother would be considered a disturber of the public peace. Of what worldly value, then, to the black man is Christ?

DEMOCRACY AND THE NEGRO

His case is not simplified when he ponders Democracy. He is living in a land where man was to be freed from the trammels of caste and unreasoned prejudice. Here oppressed men sought "freedom's largest home." Here were

to be no metes or bounds to advancement, other than what might lie in lack of ability, energy or spirit. America was dedicated to the proposition that all men are, as human souls, equal and endowed by the Creator with the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But each one of these great principles the Negro finds prostituted as soon as they are applied to him. He is not permitted really to be a citizen. His liberty of movement, residence and enjoyment is curtailed by all the devices of Jim-Crowism. He is shut out from the ballot; he is forced to reside in segregated areas; he is denied the ordinary public conveniences and utilities; he is unprotected by law; and he is, finally, of such small account in the public view that he can be lynched with impunity. This unbridled licentiousness of race prejudice lays the axe to the root of the tree of Democracy. Nobody has ever found any reasonable defense of these traduccements of the republican spirit; but the great majority of the black man's neighbors endorse them. What, then, to the black man does Democracy mean?

EDUCATION AND THE NEGRO

Education itself offers him, as yet, no certain guarantees. The present pathetic condition and influence of the average southern public Negro school is notorious. It needs no description here. A reprint from the report of the Commissioner of Education for the year ended June 30, 1912, on this subject, can be had by addressing the Department of the Interior. Other fuller studies now in progress are to be reported in the near future. Everywhere throughout the southland the Negro private secondary school is attempting, against desperate odds, what it is the confessed duty of the State to accomplish.

The Southern States do not even pretend to accord to the colored youth any adequate or just opportunity in the public schools for self-realization. For twenty-five or thirty years white public opinion has enthusiastically embraced industrial education for the Negro as a race. But this endorsement has been slow in taking material form. In 1915

there is only one Hampton and one Tuskegee where there should be a hundred. All men know how great the need is of industrial training for any people, white or black, especially in a materialistic era like our own. But no one really supposes that industrial education, even when liberally provided, is to be any solvent of the Negro's problems. No one can minimize the importance of industrial experience for the Negroes by stating its limitations. It will solve no race issue. Only the intellectually indolent can think it will. Only the blind can believe it. In spite of all our industrial propaganda throughout the land, the blunt fact today, more apparent and, in important respects, more discouraging than it was twenty-five years ago, is that there is a strong general, increasing tendency to exclude Negroes everywhere from skilled industrial pursuits. The labor unions are practically solid in their opposition to the admission of colored men. Nobody expects, in these days, to see anywhere in the land a Negro railroad conductor or motorman, engineer or pilot. In the northland any considerable group of Negro carpenters, masons, apprentices or skilled artisans of any kind in any of the great industrial establishments would create a public sensation. Employment for the colored man in the North is progressively narrowing down to menial public and domestic service. Efficiency and desert do not avail. A colored man who seeks an opening in skilled, dignified employment is met with the frank statement that the white force will "walk out" if he is admitted. Industrial education, as far as we can judge, has accomplished little or nothing in diminishing the evils of prejudice.

It is equally true that intellectual education has done no more to heal these hurts. A strong tendency has set in to exclude Negroes, however ambitious or qualified, from most of the higher technical and collegiate institutions. In numerous ways—sometimes by frank statement, sometimes by unmistakable suggestions—the American Negro is given to understand that he is not welcome in the holy places dedicated to truth. In 1915 it is, for example, practically impossible for a colored man or woman to live at Princeton University, Vassar, or even at Bryn Mawr College. Few denials

of Democracy and Christianity could be more heart-rending. When seminaries of pure learning draw the color line, what defense can black folks expect in the grosser avenues and activities of life. What, then, is the essential value of education of any description to the Negro at that crucial point where the path of his progress crosses the way of the white man?

THE PROBLEMS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY NEGRO

The clear, bare question presented to the young Negro of the twentieth century is, then, not whether the white man's Democracy and Christianity with respect to him have failed, but what his own attitude towards that failure shall be. What is to be his conscious ideal, his mind-picture of the development possible, under these embarrassed circumstances, to him? What definite program is he to project for himself?

These questions will no longer be answered by dispirited or gentle Negroes of the "mammy" type. Those pure and loyal souls could be cozened, deceived and abused without complaint. Because of their innocent impotency and their unqualified acceptance of the inferior social place, because they never even dreamed of rising above that station, the public flag is still set at half-mast when one of these worthies passes. The fidelity of the Negro slave to a sincerely appreciative master was often indeed a noble and beautiful thing; but, let it be understood, this type of Negro is to be no more in this land. The race problems of the future are to be confronted by Negroes who have known nothing of the slave regime, who have education, who believe in the unconquerable power of truth, who hate all the forms of bigotry and double dealing, who have learned to think and aspire, and who test their efficiency and success in life by no other than the highest social standards. They have been taught pride, and self-respect. They have an increasing will to rise. They chafe under anything less than a man's chance. Above all things, they are determined to

spare neither their voices nor their energies in Zion until they have achieved full, untrammelled American citizenship, or gone down in the midst of a glorious warfare for it.

FUNDAMENTAL CONVICTIONS

This new Negro, in forming his ideal, is sure of two things taught by all the experience of the civilized world. He knows that the law of God and man alike, and all of nature, are with him in two fundamental convictions. The first is that there can be no peace among races or nations without righteousness and justice. The second is, that loyalty to truth alone can make men free. The new Negro knows that as long as injustice and unrighteousness are practiced against him on every hand, there can be neither race adjustment nor lasting national peace. As long as the fundamental truth as to his human nature and human worth is denied, as long as he is regarded by law and custom as an outcast from the brotherhood of man, there can be no effective coöperation between the races. The palliatives of politics and the cunning sophistries of opportunists may be triumphant for awhile, but these at last must break down, exactly as they have all broken down in Europe, and the whole battle for Christianity and Democracy fought over again. He knows that he must erect for himself some definite goal, must build for himself some clear mind-picture of his future, which will be based squarely upon these immovable convictions, and that he must have intellectual and moral strength to follow this ideal in good and evil report. He feels that there rests upon him now, in the providence of God, nothing less than the drastic responsibility of leading Christianity and Democracy back to their ancient professions. Finally, he is convinced that his cause is no longer to be supported by vicarious champions. The days of Garrison, Sumner, John Brown, Julia Ward Howe and Thomas Wentworth Higginson are gone, just as the days of the beloved "mammy" are gone. In the future the American Negro must work out more largely his own salvation—in wholesome coöperation with white neighbors, if he can, but

single-handed, if he must. "Personal liberty," says one of his severest critics, "has, in most cases, been attained by the mass of men in a community after a severe struggle. Where it has been self-developed it is almost secure; if it has been a gift from others, the inner qualities needed to maintain it are far less likely to exist." Colored men in positions of influence and leadership are pondering this truth now as never before.

RACE IDEALS

The young Negro knows, moreover, that in framing a program for his future conduct he must steadily remember that physical force is non-availing. All the blood-letting of Europe and Asia is teaching him this lesson anew in the thunder of howitzers. His victories, in so far as they are substantial and lasting, must be invariably moral and spiritual victories. A sturdy self-control must be the first signal conquest. He must cultivate for himself and his children an uncompromising attitude with regard to the respect which he must insist that all men shall accord his integrity and humanity. He must refuse to accept the stamp of inferiority. He must have no ease until the ravages of segregation, discrimination and ignorance are checked. Yet in all of this he must exalt the principles of peace. He must speak truth without wavering, and yet with all true humility and courtesy. He must fight with all his might the good fight against isolation, and yet not stir up race animosities. He must rid himself of obsequiousness, servility of all sorts and of insincerity. Still he must assiduously cultivate the friendship of his white neighbor. In short, the young Negro of the twentieth century in America is called, by the extraordinary circumstances of his position, to a plane of idealistic moral conduct which must, in the nature of things, be superior to the behavior of the great masses of white men. He must not only be the apostle of peace; he must bring back to our world belief in the essential worth of human nature and faith in God. If he rises to this, the American Negro may give to the world a new

spiritual type, and to civilization an enduring spiritual contribution.

Now in a large view, it is just this spiritual ideal, here roughly outlined, this lofty ideal of peaceful race adjustment on a moral and spiritual basis, that the intelligent Negro minister, teacher, business man and family head are holding up for the younger generation of Negroes in these first decades of the twentieth century. I myself know nothing of slavery, but my father was a slave, and my mother, though always "free," knew at first-hand the iniquities of that disastrous system which it required the civil war to destroy. In all the thirty-five years of my life I have never heard spoken by either of my parents one word of hatred towards white people. The fear of God, belief in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, faith in the future, industry, self-control, and the moral law were ever upon their lips. Nor have I in all my life heard any Negro teacher or preacher counsel sedition or hatred or retaliation. Every representative Negro leader and spokesman known to me in the past, or known to me now, has counseled peace, coöperation, industry, self-reliance, self-control, tactful self-assertion, education, faith in man and belief in God. There has perhaps in reality been more idealism among American Negroes than among any other ethnic group in the whole population. The Negro is compelled to be an idealist.

THE FRUIT OF THESE IDEALS

In a great world view, two important questions with reference to such a people remain. The first is what fruit have these conscious ideals borne? Can we see natural results flowing from them as definitely as we can in retrospect from the ideals of the races that lived in Greece or Italy or Mesopotamia centuries ago?

Fortunately, the last census furnishes invaluable special statistics on Negroes in the United States. Advanced summaries of these statistics were released for use by the afternoon papers on April 12 of this year. These summaries will not be gainsaid. The report shows that there are

9,827,763 Negroes in the United States, representing an increase of 11.2 in ten years. Under all the handicaps already mentioned, Negroes have at this time 47.3 of their whole population from six to twenty years of age attending school, as compared with 66.9 of the whole native white population in the same age group. The whites have increased twice as rapidly as the Negroes in number, due largely to immigration, but they have not increased at the same rate in school attendance. The percentage of illiteracy of the Negro population ten years and over is only 30.4 per cent for the nation as a whole. It is true that the native white shows an illiteracy of only 3.7 per cent, but that comparison itself only brings out all the more strongly the unparalleled educational progress of a people just fifty years old in freedom, set in the midst of another people thousands of years ahead of them in all the arts of life. No ethnologist or profane historian hesitates to pronounce this the most remarkable relative progress known to man. In the southern states, according to this same government document, 1,917,391 Negroes have homes, of which 22 per cent are owned. Negroes owned farms in 1910 valued at \$1,142,000,000. The same bulletin shows a decrease in the death rate of 3.9 per cent during the ten years, as compared with a decrease of 2.5 per cent of the white population. This reduction is in itself significant and may be traceable to better teaching in the Negro school of sanitation and hygiene. Out of the whole population of more than 7,000,000 Negroes ten years of age and over, 71 per cent are reported as being gainfully employed. Finally, by the same statement, there are 36,770 Negro church organizations, with 3,685,097 communicants. No mention is made of the surprising number of Negroes distinguished in art, letters, science and the learned professions.

These statistics are, of course, finally conclusive of nothing. They serve, however, to show that the Negroes in America are, in spite of severe educational disabilities, social and political ostracism, lack of organization and adequate race consciousness, poverty, ignorance, disease and crime, a virile, advancing body. What the race may accomplish

in the future, if opportunity can be provided and the gyves of sheer prejudice broken, seems, in this view, to be clear. This race even now exhibits, by statistics, a power of production and reproduction and a large spiritual quality that will stand favorable comparison with any similar mass contribution made by Greek or Roman to the highest culture of the past. The Negro, in short, appears by all the facts we have in hand to be a national asset, not a national burden, and to be capable of unlimited progress.

THE GREAT OBSTACLE

But the final question is this: Will the white man of the future admit in spirit and in practice that the Negro must be given the fullest freedom and opportunity to continue his development? Here is the acid test. It is the white man's stubborn refusal to grant that full freedom and opportunity that constitutes the great obstacle now to the progress not only of nearly 10,000,000 human souls, but more fundamentally to the progress of Christianity and Democracy for all men. Because there is neither reason nor moral principle in the white man's present attitude towards the colored races of man the world over, it is impossible at times to see in the future anything other than a new colossal conflict. That attitude must voluntarily yield or be broken. Even a clear mind like Francis Galton's seems to lose faith and penetration when it approaches the Negro question. In his "Inquiries into Human Faculty" Galton expresses the belief that the extrusion of "the coarse and lazy Negro" would help the development of the metalliferous regions of tropical Africa. Even he could not see that it would be the descendents of these same Negroes to whom credit would be due in 1915 for what Andrew Carnegie has called the most remarkable relative progress any people ever made in fifty years. And Galton himself shows why such an extrusion of the Negro as America practices and he suggests would be unwise. "Each individual," he argues, "is the outcome of a vast number of organic elements of the most various species, just as some nations might be the outcome of a vast

number of castes of individuals, each caste monopolizing a special pursuit. Banish a number of the humbler castes—the bakers, the bricklayers and the smiths—and the nation would soon come to grief.” By this analogy it appears to be certain that the white man’s deliberate opposition to the black man’s fullest development in America is really opposition to his own substantial enrichment and support.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

The future for the Negro, as well as for the white man in this country, is shrouded in uncertainty. If the dark man’s ideals continue to be what they have been in the past, and what they are now, his race, as far as human calculation can venture, promises unlimited and widely varied advancement. But on every hand this progress is balked and embarrassed by the white man’s unconscionable denial to the Negro of Christian and Democratic treatment. The issue which this denial has already sharpened, and the increased race friction which is sure to follow the progress of education among colored people forbode nothing good. Looking back over the disasters of civilizations long since perished the enlightened Negro discerns in the nation-wide triumph of prejudice over principle all the seeds of that racial and national dissolution which has made of the world thus far a stage for unending tragedies. Only righteousness exalteth a nation; only the truth can make men free; social equilibrium is impossible where the brotherhood of man is repudiated; and morality never long survives the rejection of God. The Negro believes in Christianity and Democracy. He has measurably shaped his conscious ideals according to those supreme standards. Nothing seems now more certain than that the highest development of the Negro and the peace and security of American institutions must rest upon the degree in which the white race in America can in practice, as well as in theory, adopt the same criteria.